

the rmntes

troops, in variegated uniforms, quite bewildered,
to whom we
provided succour in the form of cigarettes (the
one reliable
currency of our time; the Fag Standard) and good
cheer. I have
a vague memory of marching rather absurdly at
the head of a
column of these battered and disheartened allies
whom I had
attempted to rally by means of a spirited but
incoherent discourse
delivered in bad bombastic French. These events
also fitted in
well with what I had tried to say in *The Thirties*.

Proposals were subsequently made and
entertained for dealing
with the Forties and Fifties in a similar vein. I even
made a start
on the Forties, but whether due to indolence,
other preoccupa-
tions, or the intrinsic unsuitability of the material,
the result
seemed unsatisfactory, and the project was
abandoned. It is, I
think, a fact that, whereas the Thirties fell neatly
into one theme,
beginning with a phoney peace and ending with a
phoney war,
the two succeeding decades had no such clear
pattern. The con-
duct and ostensibly victorious 'conclusion of the
1939-45 war
under Churchill, followed by the Beveridge Era—
from the
stuffed lion to the stuffed sheep; then two small
mice, Attlee
and Truman, in labour and bringing forth a
mountain in the
shape of atomic raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki;
Churchill's
inglorious return to power, followed by the even
more inglorious
interlude of Eden; the Cold War and the final
emergence of
the two giants, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., in
whose shadows
the rest of us perforce lived, and live—all this was
not susceptible
to arrangement in ten-yearly sections, or to the

kind of treatment
I had attempted in *The Thirties*.

In any case, as far as I am concerned, wars, like rhetoric, their language, are exciting but not interesting, and no labour could be more tedious and unrewarding than sorting out the battles and campaigns of which they^argely consist. Of all Shake-
speare's plays I most dislike *Henry V*. By the same token, the Churchill cult is one in which I did not join at the time, and find even less sympathetic as the years pass, while recognising, of course, the unique character of his services in 1940—services whose performance required the very temperament and char-